

Effective June 1, 2012

# Relocating to Serve

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## What is relocation travel in context of VISTA service?

Relocation travel is travel made by VISTA candidates and members moving to a new community when they begin their year of service.

## What is relocation assistance?

Relocation assistance is financial support that consists of a Relocation Travel Allowance and a Settling-In Allowance.

## Who is eligible for relocation assistance?

VISTA candidates or members who:

- Sign up for a 12-month term;
- Move from their permanent address also referred to as a home of record (HOR) to a new residence at their service site; and
- Move more than 50 miles from their HOR to the service site.

## What are the limits to the assistance VISTA Candidates or Members receive?

1. **Relocation Travel Allowance:** This allowance is based on the direct mileage between your site and HOR. This allowance, up to \$1,000, regardless of the mode of transportation used, includes:
  - A relocation mileage rate set by the VISTA program (23 cents per mile as of 6/1/12)
  - A shipping rate for shipment of personal belongings (10 cents per mile as of 6/1/12)
2. **Settling-In Allowance:** This one-time payment of up to \$550 is intended to help cover initial relocation costs, such as utility deposits, rental application fees, etc. Your state office determines the allowance amount, which is automatically included in your first living allowance payment. (Please note that federal taxes are deducted from your settling-in allowance but state and local taxes are not. You must pay state and local taxes on this allowance come tax time.)

## What must I consider when planning relocation travel?

Before committing yourself to relocating to serve in VISTA:

1. Weigh the professional and personal costs against the benefits of relocation when accepting a position.
2. Know the amount of the Relocation Travel Allowance you are entitled to in order to make informed decisions about arranging your travel.
3. Recognize that relocation assistance provided by the VISTA program may not cover all expenses that you incur or alleviate all inconveniences. The VISTA program will provide a reasonable allowance to defray the costs of travel necessary to enter and close service.
4. Understand that relocation is intended to match the best candidate to a specific position to benefit the project and the community. The financial assistance for relocation travel may not fully meet your hopes or preference.
5. At the end of your service, you are expected to arrange your return travel to your HOR. You will receive the same relocation travel allowance at the end of service as you do at the beginning. You must plan your finances accordingly.

## How do I ask for relocation assistance?

Contact the VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU) to request support in relocating to your service site. The VMSU can answer any questions, and approve your travel, if appropriate.

### **How do I travel from my home of record (HOR) to my service site?**

Once the VMSU has approved your request to relocate, and told you the amount of financial assistance you will receive, you will arrange your own travel from your HOR to your service site. The means of travel is up to you—air, rail, bus or personal vehicle.

You may also decide on your dates of travel in coordination with and permission of the VMSU. You may relocate prior to attending training, known as Pre-Service Orientation (PSO), after attending PSO, or attend PSO on your way to your service site. Dates and itinerary must be approved by the VMSU.

### **I understand that I arrange my own travel to my service site. How do I travel to Pre-Service Orientation (PSO)?**

- **Travel by Car:** If approved by the VMSU to travel to PSO by car, you will be reimbursed for mileage from your approved departure point to the PSO at a rate set by the VISTA program (\$0.23 per mile as of 6/1/12). You may request reimbursement for the cost of tolls and parking at the PSO, as long as you provide receipts.
- **Travel by Air, Rail, and Bus (Ticketed Travel):** For ticketed travel, the VMSU will arrange and purchase tickets for you to travel from your approved departure point to the PSO. You will receive an itinerary by email at least a week prior to your scheduled departure date. You may request reimbursement for the cost of getting to the airport (or station), as long as you provide receipts.

### **How do I know if I am approved to relocate?**

Follow the checklist below to begin the approval process:

- Talk to your project sponsor about your relocation travel and your travel to PSO.
- Complete the Relocation Travel Form, which you may receive from your project sponsor or your Corporation State Office.
  - Send the Relocation Travel Form to your state office by the deadline given by your project sponsor.
- Complete your Trainee Registration Profile in the Member Portal, [My.AmeriCorps.gov](http://My.AmeriCorps.gov), to document your travel to PSO by the deadline given by your project sponsor.
- The VMSU will contact you to let you know if your travel plans are approved. Do not arrange and pay for travel until you receive written approval from the VMSU.

### **What if I relocate to my service site without approval from the VMSU?**

If you relocate to your service site without written approval from the VMSU, you must arrange your own travel to PSO and you will receive reimbursement, if at all, to the amount VISTA policy permits.

### **How am I reimbursed for relocation expenses?**

You will sign a relocation travel voucher at PSO. VISTA will then electronically transfer your relocation travel allowance to your bank account through the US Treasury within eight weeks of PSO.

Your settling-in allowance will be added to your first living allowance deposit.

If you do not receive your reimbursement or allowance within this timeframe, please contact the VISTA Member Support Unit.

### **How do I contact the VISTA Member Support Unit?**

- By phone: Call the National Service Hotline at 800-942-2677 and select the option for the VISTA Member Support Unit.
- Online: Submit your question using a web form at <https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask>.

**How do I contact my Corporation State Office?**

Visit <http://www.americorps.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp> and click on the state that manages your VISTA project.